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SUBJECT: RUSSIAN PUBLIC'S VIEWS ON POLICE AND HUMAN RIGHTS

¶1. SUMMARY: An overwhelming majority of the Russian public believes that human rights abuse by police is widespread according to recent polling data. The police, on the contrary, believe they are unfairly maligned, but recognize problems within the MVD. These and other findings presented on September 11 by the Moscow-based Levada Center suggest that the one thing that citizens and police have in common is an adversarial view of one other. END SUMMARY

¶2. At the September 11 unveiling of a study entitled "Index of Abuse by Law Enforcement Agencies," Yuriy Levada, Director of the eponymous Levada Center, confirmed that abuses by the police are significant and are not properly being addressed by the authorities. Among the study's significant findings:

- only 25 percent of Russians have faith in the police;
- all age groups and education levels believe that abuse by the police is a serious problem, with more than 80 percent considering it a very serious or rather serious problem;
- over 50 percent of the population also thinks that authorities deploy the police against their political opponents;
- less than 14 percent of the population feel that they are properly protected by the police;
- and only 30 percent feel they can rely on other law enforcement agencies to defend their rights when they are victims of police abuse.

¶3. At the top of Russians concern about police behavior were:

- extortion of small and mid-sized businesses;
- extortion for lack of a residence permit;
- police collusion with organized crime groups;
- lack of legal or administrative recourse to police abuse.

¶4. According to the study, Russians also feared illegal behavior by the police, such as threats and physical violence, arbitrary detainment, drug and weapons "frame-ups," false testimony, and the excessive use of force during demonstrations and meetings. A slight majority of respondents, however, believed that the police had become more professional in the last two to three years.

¶5. The study also surveyed police officers, who described systemic problems in their law enforcement agencies. Findings included:

- the MVD leadership does not sufficiently address the needs of police officers;
- police said that they have no recourse against their superiors and that their work is very formalized and bureaucratic;
- the police believe that the media intentionally paint a

negative picture of them.

¶6. Tellingly, more than half of those officers surveyed consider it acceptable to use force against detained suspects, and twenty percent believe it is acceptable to plant drugs or weapons on suspects.

¶7. In summarizing the results of the study, Levada contended that although the Soviet system had collapsed, law enforcement institutions remained unchanged, especially in its outlook.

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